

The psychosocial preferences in mate selection among Pakistanis

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The present survey was targeted to identify and analyze the psychosocial preferences in mate selection among Pakistanis. The inquiry included 1100 Pakistanis (433 males and 667 females) who were all adults, educated, unmarried and belonged to the urban areas of Pakistan. The research questionnaire included 10 psychosocial preferences and the participants were asked to rank their preferences from 1 to 10. The findings were obtained through mean scores and differential analysis. The study established that men and women in Pakistan do idealize certain psychosocial preferences while making choices in mate selection and the most desired preferences of males and females differ significantly. Men, in the current study, reported to value beauty of women the most while women preferred educated men as their top priority. The findings of the current study were in aligned with earlier studies of similar nature.

Key word: Mate selection, marital preferences, feminine & masculine choices for life partners

Mate selection, rather marrying in Pakistani context, has been widely perceived a matter of extreme significance in Pakistanis' lives. In a country like Pakistan, mate selection is not considered just an agreement between two partners; hence it is thought to be an exercise which involves religion and culture. The decisions of parents and other family members are considered highly important in this regard. Apart from the very basic purpose of marriage i.e. reproduction, several other psychosocial factors are analyzed before finalizing mates. These yardsticks differ from family to family based on their unique way of thinking. Some would prefer the socioeconomic status of their prospective mates more than other factors; hence some would focus on the elements of care and affection. Thus, there was a need to scientifically investigate the most desired psychosocial preferences in mate selection by Pakistanis to see the current trends in this regard.

Investigating mate preferences in a society has certain scientific justifications. Biologically, it allows us to assess the current direction of sexual selection (Darwin, 1871). From a social perspective, it can play a very important role in the social status of sexes in a society e.g. which sex is more preferred and dominating (Buss, 2003). Furthermore, it helps in understanding the levels and trends of attraction and retention of mates and in determining the cultural evolutions (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Schmitt & Buss, 1996). The psychological criteria in mate selection are heavily influenced by biological and social aspects (Buss & Shackelford, 1997).

Males and females do have certain priorities while selecting their mates. The historical review reveals that mate

preferences of human being are somehow similar with those of several other species. The preference of females, for instance, has been culturally dominant males who would protect them better from the opponents of same species and who could provide them with better food (Smuts, 1985). Similarly, in humans, socio-economic status of males is an important yardstick for females (Buss, 1994). The parameters for the social status, however, may vary from culture to culture (Irons, 1997). Several studies have established that males prefer physical attractiveness in women and women prefer good financial prospects in men. (Buss, 1989; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Hill, 1945; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981; Hudson & Henze, 1969; Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; McGinnis, 1958; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992). Emotional stability of a partner is a similar universal preference by both the sexes (Buss & Angleitner, 1989). The same trends are replicated in studies which tried to investigate cultural differences in mate selection. Men in China prefer younger, attractive and good looking women. Women, on the other hand, prefer economically sound men (Chang, L., Wang, Y., Shackelford, T. K. & Buss, M. D., 2011). Apart from the top most and universal preference in mate selection i.e. physical attractiveness of females and sound socio-economic status of males, there are certain other aspects which secondarily influence the mate selection process. A study (Buss & Angleitner, 1989) compared mate preferences of US and German population and revealed that both males and females prefer the male partner to be older than the female. German females, in the same study, reported to have a strong desire that their spouse should be kind, understanding and intelligent. The American women, on the other hand, were more concerned about the health of their prospective spouse.

The preferences in mate selection, later on, depend on the social independence of individuals. In cultures like Pakistan, family plays a very vital role in deciding a life partner for a person. The preferred marriage partner,

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therefore, and the actual marriage partner is not always the same i.e. a gap between demand and supply. The desires in mate selection, however, affect the adjustment of partners later in their life. The current survey was aimed to rank the psychosocial preferences of Pakistanis in mate selection.

Method

Participants

The research participants were 1100 conveniently selected Pakistani unmarried adults whose age was between 19 to 30 years. There were 433 males and 667 females who participated in the survey. All the participants were educated and belonged to the urban areas of Pakistan.

Questionnaire

A specific questionnaire was developed to collect data for the current study. A pilot study was conducted on 100 participants who were provided with no options and were asked to provide and rank the top ten psychosocial attributes which they desired while selecting their mates. The findings of the pilot study provided 10 possible psychosocial attributes for mate selection. These were (1) beautiful / handsome (2) obedient / homely (3) educated (4) earning (5) sensible (6) caring (7) sound family background (8) religious (9) frugal and (10) attractive / stylish. The research questionnaire included these 10 attributes and the participants were asked to rank their preferences among the given psychosocial attributes. The instructions clearly mentioned that 1 would mean the top most priority and 10 would mean the least preferred priority. The questionnaire also included the demographic questions e.g. age, gender, educational qualification and location of the participants.

Procedure

The researcher posted the questionnaire to his contacts in different universities of Pakistan. The questionnaires were delivered to students and teachers both who were adults, unmarried, and educated. The questionnaire was in English and was self explanatory with clear instructions. The data collected back was analyzed in SPSS. The 1st priority by the respondent was considered to be worthy of 100 marks, the 10th priority by the respondent was given 10 marks and so forth. The results were calculated in tabulated forms.

Results

The analysis of the psychosocial preferences in mate selection among Pakistanis was carried out by percentages, frequencies and independent sample *t*-test through SPSS 20.

Table 1 indicates the scores obtained by the male respondents against each psychosocial preference in mate selection. The scores were further converted into percentages as projected in Table 1.

*Table 1
Obtained Scores and Percentages of Males' psychosocial preferences in mate selection*

Psychosocial Preferences	Score	Percentage
Beautiful	27450	11.49
Educated	27120	11.35
Sensible	26520	11.10
Religious	26470	11.08
Caring	25830	10.81
Obedient and homely	25140	10.52
Family background	22530	9.43
Attractive and stylish	19820	8.29
Earning	19290	8.07
Frugal	18830	7.88

Table 2 indicates the scores obtained by the female respondents against each psychosocial preference in mate selection. The scores were further converted into percentages as projected in Table 2.

*Table 2
Obtained Scores and Percentages of Females' psychosocial preferences in mate selection*

Psychosocial Preferences	Score	Percentage
Educated	46280	12.63
Caring	42100	11.49
Earning	40630	11.09
Sensible	39330	10.74
Handsome	38320	10.46
Religious	37800	10.32
Obedient and homely	33280	9.08
Family Background	33090	9.03
Attractive and stylish	30130	8.22
Frugal	25380	6.93

Table 3 indicates that the psychosocial preferences i.e. Beautiful / Handsome, Obedient / Homely, Educated, Earning and Frugal have significant differences on the basis of gender. On the other hand, the psychosocial preferences i.e. Sensible, Caring, Family Background, Religious and Attractive / Stylish have insignificant differences on the basis of gender.

Table 3
Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Psychosocial Preferences in Mate Selection

Preference	Males (N=433)		Females (N=667)		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Beautiful/ Handsome **	63.25	28.65	57.62	27.66	.001
Obedient/ Homely **	57.93	27.63	49.97	26.39	.000
Educated **	62.49	27.21	69.49	25.57	.000
Earning **	44.45	28.24	61.01	26.25	.000
Sensible	61.11	24.92	59.05	26.17	.196
Caring	59.52	26.39	63.21	27.40	.027
Family Background	51.91	27.34	49.68	26.21	.176
Religious	60.99	28.46	56.76	28.51	.016
Frugal *	43.39	28.46	38.11	29.76	.004
Attractive / Stylish	45.67	29.48	45.24	29.15	.813

**Significant difference at .001 level

*Significant difference at .005 level

Discussion

The current survey was targeted at identifying the psychosocial preferences for Pakistanis in mate selection. On the basis of findings gathered from 1100 respondents, it was revealed that males and females do prioritize their ideal partners on certain psychosocial grounds and their preferences are different on the basis of gender.

Mate selection, being an important event in one's life, is studied by researchers worldwide. From a socio-cultural perspective, interaction of social classes and gender based inequalities play an important role in mate selection (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Jackson, 1992). Typically, males in many societies are assigned with roles having greater power and prestige. This leads women to develop a desire to maximize their influence in the society by being associated with males having more power and prestige (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). The trends in marrying have been changing very rapidly in different societies globally (Rehman, 2002). Marrying is considered a compound of one's cultural, religious, legal and social life; hence making it an important decision. Apart from some basic preferences e.g. physical attractiveness and resourcefulness, the criteria of mate selection may vary from culture to culture. Earlier studies from different cultures have revealed certain interesting facts. The psychosocial preferences which were found significant in mate selection include love, social status, financial resources, education, physical attractiveness, and desires for family and children (Buss, 2003).

The findings of current study have revealed gender specific facts in terms of mate selection in Pakistani society. Men have valued beauty the most while women have placed education on top. In align with the previous studies, women are found to be more concerned with the financial stability of their mates while for men it is not an area of much priority in mate selection. To be religious is an area which can be considered a preference for both men and women. Family background, interestingly, is not important as it is commonly perceived in the society. The differential analysis (table 3) further revealed that the psychosocial preferences on which

males and females have significant difference of choice are beauty / handsomeness, obedience / being homely, education, earnings and frugality. The psychosocial preferences on which males and females do not differ with each other significantly i.e. the common preferences for them are sensibility, care, family background, religiosity and physical attractiveness. The findings can be best observed while analyzing the tables and figures provided earlier. The current study, however, has established that men and women in Pakistan do think of certain psychosocial preferences while making choices for mate selection and they have significant differences of choice on the basis of their gender.

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